

THE ROUND TABLE, THE COMMONWEALTH QUARTERLY

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IN DEFENCE OF THE C.I.A.

TOO MUCH PIOUS HYPOCRISY

FREDERIC W. COLLINS

THE Central Intelligence Agency, the C.I.A., its logotype as renowned as 007, is going through another time of troubles with a certain segment of the American public which thinks it finds some political profit or fulfilment of conscience in flailing at a foe forbidden by its own very nature openly to strike back. The impulse for self-examination and self-criticism and the conduct of public affairs in a goldfish bowl may be among the cardinal American virtues; but like all virtues they can if permitted to run wild begin to become an end in themselves without relevance to practical context.

It simply cannot be argued within the boundaries of common sense that the intelligence functions of a major power, using the word "intelligence" in all its connotations, can be conducted in full view of the public. The C.I.A. must have the protection of secrecy. That this imperative is at odds with some of the cherished principles of an open society is regrettable, but it does not present an insoluble problem. It requires a compromise fundamentally no more disturbing than that by which the United States government, rather than private enterprise, assumes the task of carrying mail.

This compromise in respect of the C.I.A. has been worked out. Its terms are wholly compatible with the principles of representative government. It confers upon a limited number of people, a very limited number, the responsibility of monitoring on behalf of everyone else the activities of the C.I.A. It is possible to trace, and in the course of this article there will be traced, a clear linkage between what the public wishes to permit the C.I.A. to do and the effective terms of the C.I.A.'s licence to operate. This linkage holds the C.I.A. to its functions as an instrument of the Presidency. It permits the C.I.A. to carry out a responsibility essential to today's unique American undertaking as the strongest champion of freedom in a world unique in the scope, intensity, profundity and obstinacy of the conflicts which beset it.

The C.I.A. has made some mistakes, but many of them have been more in the nature of errors in public relations than in objectives and methods. It is a young agency, not yet 20 years old. Having such an agency was a novel experience for the United States, at a time when the country entered upon a period of its history in which it suddenly found itself having one nightmare after another, and could not at once realize they were not nightmares. The means of controlling a secret agency had to be invented, or evolved by trial—and error.

It is my personal conviction, firmly held even if only my own, that the